

PREGNANT WOMEN SEEK HELP FROM PRO-LIFE GROUPS

by Sharon Brooks Hodge



On a winter morning in 1995, a freshman at the University of Houston had more on her mind than final exams. She was pondering one of the most difficult choices anyone will ever have to make. And it was, without exaggeration, a life or death decision: what should she do about the unplanned pregnancy complicating the last carefree days of youth?

Every year for the last decade, about 1.3 million women arrived at the same solution for resolving their precarious situations as this coed in Texas. They chose to terminate their pregnancies by having an abortion. According to the Centers for Disease Control, roughly 35 percent of all legal abortions in this country are performed on African-American women.

And that concerns people like Juluette Bartlett Pack. She wonders what has happened to the black community's respect for life and desire to live in a manner that pleases God. To Pack, herself a wife and mother, the growing number of black women getting pregnant out of wedlock and then preventing the fetus from becoming a baby is not just a statistic about abortion. The numbers also make a loud statement about Christianity, says Pack, adding that the message is disturbing.

"Abortion advocates want to paint a picture of people interfering with a woman's right to choose," says Pack. Then she asks, "Do women really have a choice when abortion is the only option?" That's not a rhetorical question. Consider the traumatic pregnancy of the student in Texas. She still lived at home with her parents, who insisted that she terminate the pregnancy. If she did not, she would be put out of the house, left to provide for herself. The baby's father, too, urged her to have an abortion. Although that was not the choice she wanted to make, the young woman could not see how she could take care of a child on her own. So she picked up the phone and called to make arrangements for an abortion.

As luck would have it, or call it divine intervention, her first call was to Houston's Family Assistance Center. Instead of

talking to someone about ending life, the teen in trouble spoke with Juluette Pack, who offered her a life affirming alternative. Pack's nonprofit center found a home for the woman to live in until her baby was born. Caring Christians at the Family Assistance Center helped provide all the tangible necessities, referred the mother-to-be to an adoption agency, which found a loving, permanent home for the infant.

Family Assistance Center's work did not end with meeting the physical needs. Pack's group also tended to the teen's broken spirituality.

"She was grateful to get the encouragement to make the decision for life," recalls Pack. Now, many months later, the woman who was once in trouble is preparing to counsel others who face the same tough decision.

The Family Assistance Center grew out of a vision Pack had for the preservation of families. With the backing of the Christian organization Texas Black Americans for Life, and financial assistance from two predominantly white churches, Pack purchased and renovated a duplex in one of Houston's black neighborhoods.

There, both men and women are compassionately advised about the consequences of promiscuous sexual behavior, says Pack.

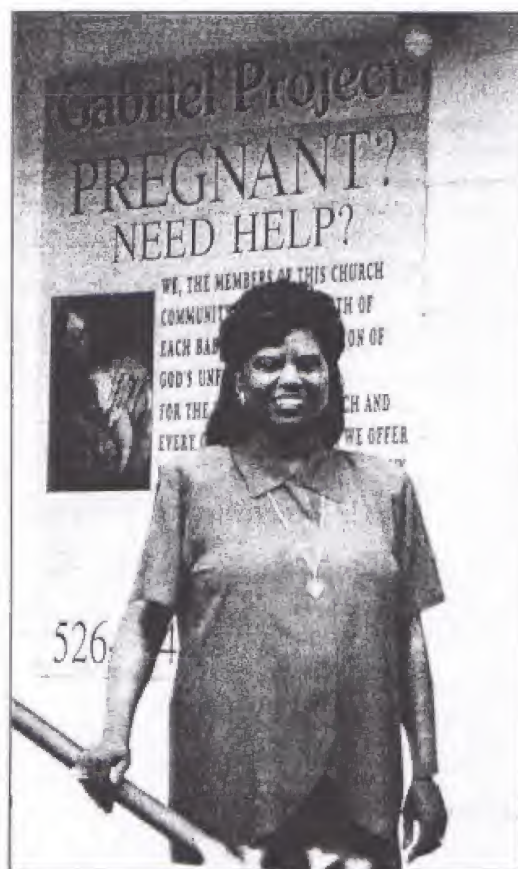
"I have a burden on my heart to raise the issue and share what God has to say because apparently His position is not being taught in a lot of black churches," Pack says. A large percentage of her clientele are also members of prominently black congregations. One of those churches even includes a \$20,000 gift to Planned Parenthood in its annual budget.

But Pack is skeptical of that organization's motives. She's not alone. Like Pack in Houston, Dean Gavaris, who runs a similar organization on the outskirts of Newark, N.J., also believes there are ulterior motives behind the easy access Planned Parenthood provides to abortion. Both Gavaris and Pack point to the white supremacist views of Margaret Sanger, who founded

the organization. In 1939, the Federation of Planned Parenthood contrived its "Negro Project" with the intention of reducing minority and poor white populations through population control programs.

In its brochure for women facing crisis pregnancies, the Family Assistance Center warns those considering abortion that Sanger and Planned Parenthood have a goal "to seduce our community into their ideas of 'family planning' by buying influence with our ministers, doctors, other medical professionals and media outlets. Most of Planned Parenthood's clinics are in high minority population areas."

Although Dean Gavaris is not black, about 96 percent of the women who come to the Gateway Pregnancy Center in



Juluette Bartlett Pack at the Houston-based Family Assistance Center